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Venezuela: Political will and resources needed to make law reality

(Caracas) In a new report published today, Amnesty International urged the Venezuelan authorities to show the political will and provide the resources needed to ensure the new law on violence against women will not just exist on paper.

“The 2007 Venezuelan law to protect women from violence is an example for the rest of the region but it will be useless for women unless it’s fully implemented,” said Guadalupe Marengo, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Americas Programme.

“Implementation of the law means more shelters, special tribunals and training for those who have to deal with these crimes.”

Amnesty International’s report looks at the reality of domestic violence for women in Venezuela. Thousands of women in Venezuela suffer beatings, verbal abuse and rape at home. In 2007 alone, 4,484 women called a helpline set up by INAMUJER (National Institute of Women’s Affairs) to report abuse. Local organizations, however, estimate that only 1 in 9 women report violence to the authorities.

Many of the women who talked to Amnesty International in Venezuela said that lack of financial independence, information, insufficient shelters – only two in a country of over 27 million inhabitants -- and a poorly resourced police and judicial infrastructure, make it hard for them to feel safe.

“Thousands of women in Venezuela live in a constant state of fear of violence from their partners, fear for their lives and the safety of their children. When a safety net is not provided, many women feel that they have no choice but to stay with their abuser or to be homeless and unable to support themselves or their children,” said Guadalupe Marengo.

In March 2007, the government passed a law that defines violence against women as a human rights violation and reaffirms the responsibility of the state and its officials to eradicate it. The law replaced one passed in 1999 that, although positive, failed to be fully implemented.

It sets out measures to prevent violence against women, to protect women at risk and to punish those responsible. It also requires the authorities to implement a far reaching programme to raise awareness and challenge public attitudes which condone or conceal this under-reported crime.

“Venezuela’s government needs to step up to the challenge set by the 2007 law.”

A copy of the report “‘The law is there, let’s use it – ending domestic violence in Venezuela’”, will be available from Wednesday 16 July 2008 at 22:00 GMT on

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR53/001/2008/en>

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